The Character and Religion of PRESIDENT LINCOLN

A LETTER OF

NOAH BROOKS

MAY 10, 1865

CHAMPLAIN
PRIVATELY PRINTED
1919

To the Official Bibliographer
of Lincolniana
Judge Daniel Fish
with best regards of
Hugh McLellan

March 22, 1920.

Bibliographical Note.
The first 26 copies contain
an error in spelling in line 9.
page 10.

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Foreword

REPLYING to a letter in which I had, with some enthusiasm, mentioned the revival of a boyhood hobby in the Moorsfield Preſs, Mr. Thomas J. Taylor, of Taunton, sent me this letter, written in 1865 by Noah Brooks to the Rev. Isaac P. Langworthy, of Chelsea, Mass.; and suggested that it might be worthy of being preserved in an accessible form. I fully agreed with Mr. Taylor, recognizing this letter to contain very early and reliable evidence as to the religious belief of President Lincoln, although it seems quite superfluous to have ever questioned his essential Christianity.

In 1873 a heated discussion, however, arose on the subject. The Rev. J. A. Reed, Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, in Springfield, Ill., published a lecture on "The Later Life and Religious Sentiments of Abraham Lincoln," in Scribner's Magazine for July of that year. Almost immediately William H. Herndon, in a lecture, afterwards published by him in the form of a broadside, attempted to refute the statements of Mr. Reed, and was in turn attacked by B. F. Irwin, in an article printed in the Illinois State Journal of May 16th, 1874.

Both the Reed and Herndon lectures were reprinted by Mr. Judd Stewart in 1915 in a volume entitled: "The

Religion of Abraham Lincoln," *and the* Irwin *article was reprinted this year (1919) by Mr.* H. E. Barker, *of Springfield, Illinois.*

Mr. Reed's *article also contained a letter from* Noah Brooks *which, although written some seven years later, will serve as a supplement to his letter to Mr.* Langworthy, *and is here given in full:–*

New York, Dec. 31st, 1872.

Rev. J. A. Reed:

My Dear Sir – In addition to what has appeared from my pen, I will state that I have had many conversations with Mr. Lincoln, which were more or less of a religious character, and while I never tried to draw anything like a statement of his views from him, yet he freely expressed himself to me as having "a hope of blessed immortality through Jesus Christ." His views seemed to settle so naturally around that statement, that I considered no other necessary. His language seemed not that of an inquirer, but of one who had a prior settled belief in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion. Once or twice, speaking to me of the change which had come upon him, he said, while he could not fix any definite time, yet it was after he came here, and I am very positive that in his own mind he identified it with about the time of Willie's death. He said, too, that after he went to the White House he kept up the habit of daily prayer. Sometimes he said it was only ten words, but those ten words he had. There is no possible reason to suppose that Mr. Lincoln would ever deceive me as to his religious sentiments. In many conversations with him, I absorbed the firm conviction that Mr. Lincoln was at heart a Christian man, believed in the Saviour, and was seriously considering the step which would formally connect him with the visible Church on earth. Certainly, any suggestion as to Mr. Lincoln's skepticism or infidelity, to me who knew him intimately from 1862 till the time of his death, is a monstrous fiction — a shocking perversion.

Yours truly,

Noah Brooks.

The close relations which existed between Mr. Brooks *and Mr.* Lincoln *are well known to students, and the evidence contained in these letters should carry considerable weight.*

Mr. Brooks *did secure the position which Mr.* Lincoln *had offered to him, which was that of Naval Officer at San Francisco.*

HUGH MCLELLAN.

Champlain, N.Y., Nov. 29, 1919.

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A LETTER of NOAH BROOKS on the CHARACTER & RELIGION of PRESIDENT LINCOLN

WASHINGTON, May 10, 1865.

My Dear Sir:

Your kind letter of the 27th, written from Conn. was received with pleasure, and should have been answered sooner, but for the pressure upon me of much of that sort of work. It was long after Mr. Lincoln's death before I could trust myself to write a letter, or find any heart to speak of that which so weighed upon my mind. I suppose that we all felt a personal interest in our beloved President, from the peculiar qualities of his mind, which seemed to familiarize him with the people; but no man outside of my own family circle was ever so much to me as he was, and I cannot yet, perhaps I never may, contemplate his cruel and tragic taking-off with calmness. He was so kind, loving and gentle that no man could even partially know him and be his enemy. The plain, homely face, every *quirk* of which I knew, was sometimes suffused with a light which was almost transfiguration, and, though he had firmness enough when it was needed, he was more devoid of

anger, clamor, evil-speaking and uncharity than any human being I ever knew or heard of.

But he is gone, and even his virtues avail nothing to recall him from the world of spirits, and we have only to gather us the mementoes which we have [of] him, to finish the work which he left and to try and imitate that immortal part of him which still survives. I am glad now that I never hesitated, when proper occasion offered, to talk with him upon religious matters, for I think that the best evidences of his belief in Christ are those which I derived in free and easy conversations with him. You know I had an intimate acquaintance with him, which was not hampered or embarrassed by any official or business relations, nor did he have the same undefined reluctance which a man in his position would have had in talking upon religious matters, if I had been a clergyman. For myself, I am glad to say that I have a firm belief in Mr. Lincoln's saving knowledge of Christ; he talked always of Christ, his cross, his atonement; he prayed regularly, cast all his cares on God and felt inexpressible relief thereby; was almost as familiar with the Bible as our old friend Field, whose prayer-meeting quotations—chapter and verse—have frequently come into my mind when I have listened to the President's conversation. Mr. Frost will recollect that I repeated to him last winter part of a conversation which I held with the President soon after his re-election, when he told me that the prayers of the people had greatly sustained him, and that he had always sought from God, the source of

knowledge and wisdom, that strength which he needed. This he often repeated to others, substantially.

After Mr. Lincoln's death, the natural delicacy at speaking of his religious exercises being removed, I purposed writing a brief sketch of some parts of his character for the "Congregationalist," but the matter grew on my hands, being interwoven with other traits of his character, until I made up an article of twenty-five pages foolscap, which I now think I shall publish in Harper's Monthly, that being so generally circulated that I should insure a more general reading, perhaps, than in any other way. I will let you know, however, when it comes out.

As you may be partly aware, the death of our beloved Lincoln changes all my plans. At first, when it appeared doubtful if Nicolay could be induced to go abroad, I accepted from Mr. Lincoln the promise of a lucrative place in San Francisco, and had well-nigh concluded to go there when Nicolay concluded to go abroad. The President was then anxious for me to take the place near him, but demurred at my sacrificing so much for the sake of serving him, and offered me the privilege of continuing my correspondence, which pay as much as the salary of secretary. This I declined, telling him that the sacrifice, such as it was, was mine, and I had a right to make it, a view of the case in which he finally acquiesced, with the understanding that he would make all of the perquisites of the place, living, &c. liberal as possible. I would have made myself poor for the sake of serving a man so dear

to me, and for the sake of serving the Country by saving him for better and higher duties, as well as my influencing him unconsciously in some ways which would be useful to the cause of truth and of religion; then I saw the opportunity for doing good, by setting a pure example in a place of some mark, and so securing for myself a wider sphere of usefulness. But all this has perished as a dream, and was never to be; I always felt so, somehow, but I considerd that there were no hindrances that I could *see*, never once thinking of his death. God's ways are not as ours, and in an hour when we thought not, our almost idolized President was taken from us. The Nation survives, and the principles for which Lincoln manfully and persistently battled, can never die. So we have much to be thankful for, and especially ought we to be thankful that he was spared to us until we, as well as he, could look from our political Pisgah into the peaceful land beyond. He died in the fullness of his prime, and in the zenith of his fame; his dying sooner might have been a greater calamity, and his dying later might have left behind him a people less united in purpose and less united in their tearful veneration of his memory.

Mrs. Lincoln still remains at the White House, more dead than alive, shattered and broken by the horrors of that dreadful night, as well as worn down by bodily sickness. She will remove to Illinois next week, however, she now thinks.

I should think better of Johnson if he did not talk so much; he gives Scripture measure to those who ad-

dress him, though they speak never so briefly. I hope he will do well.

If I go to California, I shall go in June, but do not know if I can now secure the place which Mr. Lincoln offered me. If I do not go, I shall spend the summer in New England, so that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you.

Remember me kindly to Mrs. Langworthy and the boys. Excuse the length of this desultory letter.

Yours truly,

NOAH BROOKS.

Sixty-three copies of this *Letter* were privately printed by *Hugh McLellan*, in the month of *November*, *1919*, at the *Moorsfield Press*, *Champlain*, *N. Y.* — the third production of this *Press*.

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